History of Settlement in al-Qasr

173 [166] [175] 173 *613 •[712] The settlement of al-Qasr took place about 200 years ago when the Awlad 'Ali first came to the area from Cyrenaica. No historical documentation for this period exists. The various versions which the Bedouins offer are both vague and ethnocentric with reference to lineage. A point of consensus is that the zone was first claimed by Abu Mahjuba who built a large fort (qasr = "fort" or "castle") near the coast. The Bedouins say that Abu Mahjuba settled in the area of al-Qasr because "he knew good land when he saw it." He belonged to no one lineage, "he was 'Aishaibi only." All of the lineages of al-Qasr claim that their ancestors came with Abu Mahjuba and settled on the land at that time. Abu Mahjuba has been mythologized: he belongs to all of al-Qasr, a symbol of local group solidarity and fraternal equality.

173 361 [198] Al-Qasr represents the end of nomadic life for the 'Aishaibat tribe. According to the Bedouins, each tribe and lineage took that part of al-Qasr which it preferred. If the members of the segment wanted to grow vegetables, they took land on the coast; if they preferred the "old way of life," they set up their tents in the sha'ir wi mar'a area and raised sheep. "Everything was fine," they say, "there were no land registration laws--a man was free." Al-Qasr was settled [619] "after the wars" (with the Hanadi), and it was only then that the Awlad 'Ali broke up into tribes. The 'Aishaibat took the

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Italy would therefore withdraw from her colonial adventure, advised the Amir to sign the Accord of al-Rajma in the hope that he would not have to carry out its terms. He was later to spend over 16 years in exile in Italy for his alleged duplicity. The Italians did not at this time charge the Amir with more than weakness when, after the stipulated eight months had passed, he had failed to carry out the terms of the accord, especially in the matter of the armed Sanusi camps.

These camps were supply points garrisoned by the remnants of the Sanusi army of 1917. Through them and from them the Sanusiya was exercising political control over the country and administering the tribes. The chief camps in 1917 were Ajadabiya, al-Shlaidima, Marawa, Khawalan, al-Abyar, Taknis, and 'Akrama. Each was under a *qaimaqam* and had its commandant of troops, its qadi for judicial proceedings, and its tithe collectors who collected from the Bedouin a tax on crops and flocks. With the development of the political functions of the Order alms had been transformed into taxes. Ajadabiya and al-Shlaidima had as their *nazir*, inspector, 'Ali Pasha al-'Abdiya. Al-Abyar and Taknis came under Sidi 'Umar al-Mukhtar, and Marawa, Khawalan, and 'Akrama came under Sayyid Safi al-Din.

When asked why these camps had not been broken up the Amir said that the accord had been very badly received by the Bedouin and that were it to be enforced hastily serious disturbances might ensue. He counselled caution. In addition to the continuance of the armed camps in defiance of the accord, the Italians also complained of concerted passive resistance, on the part of the Shaikhs of Sanusiya lodges and the Shaikhs of tribes, to collaboration with their officials; but either because they were not yet ready to use force or because they were convinced that the Amir was unable to dictate to his followers, and probably for both reasons, they continued to temporize.

By the further Accord of Bu Mariyam of 11 November 1921 the dissolution of the armed camps was confirmed, but it was agreed that until the Italians had strengthened their administrative control and political influence in the country the still-existing Sanusi camps should be held jointly. There were to be four so-called '*Campi Misti*', at al-Abyar, Taknis, Slanta, and 'Akrama, manned by Italian and Sanusi troops in the

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*175 *648 • 712 701 631 *795 proportion of 5 to 4, each controlled by its own representative. To these four was later added a fifth camp, al-Makhili, so that the Italians might establish themselves at an important watering-place of the southern nomads.

The new arrangement was fantastic. Two forces, each under its own officers and flag, each opposed to the other in every particular, were jointly responsible for the security and welfare of the country. What made it even more absurd in the eyes of later Fascist critics was the fact that the Sanusi soldiers in these camps received their rations and pay from the Italian Government they did everything to flout. It was, moreover, an admission on the part of the Italians that they were unable to enforce the accords they signed with the Amir if the Bedouin did not intend to carry out their terms, and that they could not establish themselves in the country unless the Sanusiya was ready to allow them to do so. All that apologists for this new accord have been able to say in defence of it was that the Italian Government had by this time realized that nothing was in any case likely to come of all these agreements and in the end only signed it in order that, while formally respecting it, they might have time and opportunity to establish their authority among the tribes, particularly among the 'Awaqir, the western Darsa, the Bara'asa, and the 'Abaidat. The Rome Government, not wanting to increase its troubles by starting a new war in Cyrenaica, imposed a policy of appeasement on its restless Colonial Government. It was bad enough to have to face the anarchy in Tripolitania, and there was always a danger that if the situation in Cyrenaica deteriorated Sayyid Ahmad might return to raise again the standard of revolt. Sayyid Idris might be weak and at times difficult, but he was at least pacific. The harassed Governor was therefore instructed that he would have to continue the battle of words till it became feasible to open real hostilities. However, the Italian Government were mistaken in believing that the new accord would allow them to increase their influence in the country, for the Sanusiya, through its representatives in the 'Mixed Camps', came between the tribes and the Italians. It is generally admitted by Italian commentators that after Bu Mariyam the Government was only apparently in the ascendancy politically, while in fact the administration of the whole country outside the towns continued

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Accord of al-Rajma. But the Italians were not yet ready to break with him finally, not wishing to compromise the operations they were carrying out in Tripolitania. They therefore started new discussions, conducted in person by Amendola, the Minister for the Colonies, who, on his return to Italy, expressed satisfaction with the talks and confidence in the Amir, neither of which he could have felt. In Mondaini's opinion the Government's policy of continuing to treat with the Sanusiya at so late a stage was consistent and, in the circumstances, wise, for it was believed that the greed for lucre and honours so unashamedly displayed by members of the Amir's family would bring them into disrepute among the Arabs, while the Government would be able to organize under its administration the zone of the plateau nearest its coastal bases and thus prepare for its penetration into the interior. In defence of Amendola's policy, later subjected to much criticism,[1] Mondaini further observes that the Fascist Government itself delayed action till the spring of 1923 when the Tripolitanian rebellion had been crushed.[2]

Concessions certainly did not lessen tension. The Italians felt that the Sanusiya was using the 'Mixed Camps' as a medium for anti-Italian propaganda, as indeed they were, not only through their official representatives in the camps but also through persons not officially recognized, such as the Sanusiya Shaikhs 'Umar al-Mukhtar, Salih al-'Awwami, and Khalid al-Humri; and they suspected that Shaikh 'Abd al-Aziz al-'Isawi had been sent by the Amir into the Misurata region to act as his liaison with the insurgents there. The Amir had selected for his personal advisers the most recalcitrant of the zawiya Shaikhs. They further accused the Order of responsibility for certain incidents which happened in the late summer of 1922: an attack on an Italian postal car near al-Zawiya al-Baida and the firing of some Italian property at al-Zuwaitina. Rome, said to have been misled by 'Umar Pasha al-Kakhiya, blamed the local government for these incidents and appointed a new Governor who made a further, and as it turned out final, gesture of conciliation by paying to the Amir the remainder of the money owing to him under the Accord of al-Rajma. But nothing could brake the wheels now. Already in August the Committee elected

[1] Giglio, op. cit., p. 99. [2] Mondaini, op. cit., p. 475.

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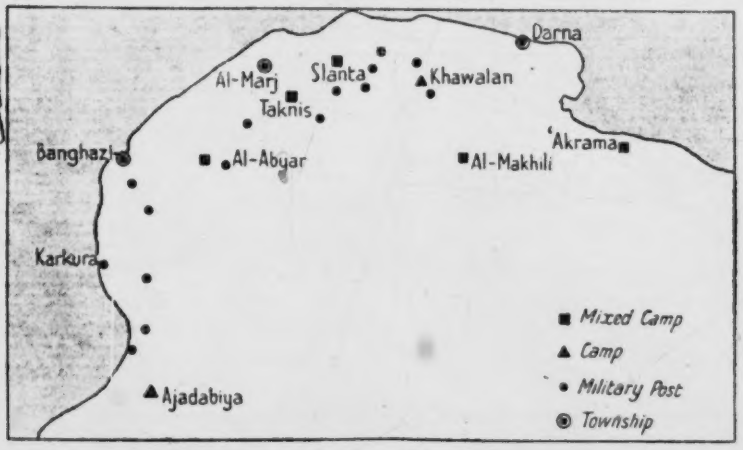
lished on their own account, and the Italians considered illegally, a camp at Khawalan of about 100 men and a number of small posts, shown on the map, with about 15 to 30 men in each. Their headquarters force was at Ajadabiya.

As stated at the end of the last chapter, Gen. Bongiovanni seized the 'Mixed Camps' on 6 March 1923. Though this day may be regarded as the date of the recommencement of hostilities



Distribution of Sanusi forces in March 1923.

in Cyrenaica, the first operational phase proper was a drive to the south of Banghazi. The country there offered fewer difficulties to mechanized movement in the grand style than the plateau country, and it was near the main Italian base. The objective was the little village of Ajadabiya, the Sanusi seat of government and military headquarters, called grandiloquently by Bongiovanni after its capture the '*Roccaforte della Senussia*'.[1] The Italians seem to have believed that they had only to take it for resistance to collapse everywhere, much as it had collapsed in Old Tripolitania after the chief centres had been occupied. The Sanusi forces, under their Commander, Qajja bin 'Abdalla, a Qur'ani of Tibesti, were unable to defend the village against so large and well-equipped a column, and after they had been worsted in several fights they retired, leaving the jubilant

[1] *Proclama alle popolazioni*, 1923, p. 5.